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ABSTRACT

Although some researchers have distinguished the concepts of pain and suffering and despite the recent rise of many centers for pain management in the United States, medical educators and practitioners have given little attention to the topic of suffering. In the studies which have been conducted, patients differed in styles of coping with and interpreting the pain experience. A review of the literature identified 11 attitudes and corresponding subscales which could be used to investigate attitudinal differences between men and women and between lay and religious people among retirees. A 99-item questionnaire was administered to 80 retirees (mean age=73.4): 20 lay men, 20 lay women, 20 religious men, and 20 religious women. The results indicated that lay people tended to have stronger attitudes than religious people and men seemed to have stronger attitudes than women, Tukey's studentized range test revealed that the lay group had a stronger bad-luck attitude, a stronger defensive attitude, and a weaker redemptive attitude than did the religious group. It also showed that men had a stronger laws-of-nature attitude than did women. The results suggest that individuals draw upon a variety of attitudes when faced with an interpretation of pain. (TW)

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Coping Attitudes Toward Personal Suffering Among Retirees

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Running head: Coping Attitudes

Abstract

A search of the journals and literature yielded 11 attitudes people assume in the face of personal suffering in their lives. A 99-item questionnaire was constructed and administered to 80 retired people whose mean age was 73.4. Results indicated the prevalence of each attitude among the respondents. ANOVAS found that the 11 attitudes were significantly different with the entire group, with the retirees divided into men and women, with their division into lay and religious, and with the group divided into lay men, lay women, religious men, religious women. None of the groups, however, differed significantly between themselves. An interaction effect of group and attitude was found for the four groups and for the two groups of men and women, but was not found for the two groups of lay and religious. MANOVAS on each of the 11 attitudes revealed one significant main effect for the sex factor on the laws-of-nature attitude and four significant main effects for the state factor on the defensive, bad-luck, personal-growth, and redemptive attitudes. A near-significant interaction effect of sex and state on the minimizing attitude was found.

Coping Attitudes Toward Personal Suffering Among Retirees

Most researchers have used pain as synonymous with suffering, but over the last 20 years a few of them have made a distinction between the two psychological experiences. The term "pain experience" has been suggested as an alternative to "pain", because it includes the individual's integration of all the effects of noxious stimuli: for example, the reaction to threat of pain; sensations like heat, cold, and pressure, which accompany the sensation of pain; and psychological reactions to the pain sensations (Cassel, 1982; Merskey & Spear, 1967; Murray, 1971). Pain, therefore, is considered as the stimulus for suffering, an experience of bodies, the cognitive awareness of nociceptive stimulation to the organism; suffering, on the other hand, is a response to a pain sensation, an experience of persons, the affective state of anguish of a person who bears pain, injury, or loss (Barrell & Neimeyer, 1975; Copp, 1974; Koskoff & Hagg, 1981; Urban, 1982). Little attention has specifically centered in on the topic of suffering by medical educators and practitioners, nursing personnel, and by research workers in the human sciences.

In the last ten years more than 900 centers for pain management have sprung up in the United States alone, in which a diversity of medical and psychological methods are employed to treat chronic suffering (Stark, 1985). On closer examination of the psychological methods, patients appear to have utilized a variety of styles in

coping with personal suffering. Patients universally sought meaning in their suffering by making an interpretation of it. Feelings and emotions resulted from their particular interpretation and, in turn, generated action-tendencies toward performing different kinds of behavior. These three components of an attitude, cognitive, affective, and action-tendential were exerpted from patients' reports of their suffering, and from therapists' interpretations, reflections and clarifications of the suffering, and these components were combined into specific attitudes (Breckler, 1984). Other attitudes toward suffering have been gathered from numerous writings on suffering by theologians, philosophers, psychiatrists, and psychologists (Copp, 1974; Kushner, 1981; Opdenaker, 1975).

Initially, this investigation sought to discover the attitudes people assume in the face of chronic suffering in their lives, but the result of the journal and literature research was the identification of 11 attitudes and the construction of the 11 subscales. Therefore, the present research sought to investigate the prevalence of these attitudes among retirees. It hypothesizes an attitudinal difference between men and women and between lay and religious people.

Method

Subjects. The respondents to the questionnaire were 80 retirees. The 99-item questionnaire was administered to them most

often at their retirement centers but occasionally it was administered to them in their homes. Most of the retirees could read the instructions and fill out the questionnaires in a group, but it was given orally to a few persons who were too feeble or lacked vision enough to take it in the group. The mean age was 74.3 for 20 lay men, 73.9 for 20 lay women, 70.9 for 20 religious men, and 74.8 for 20 religious women.

Dependent Measures. An attitude scale was constructed for each of the 11 attitudes found. Each subscale was composed of nine items, in which there were three statements for each component of an attitude. The perceptual component had three statements dealing with the way a person interprets suffering in one's own life. The affective reactions to different interpretations of suffering were embodied in the next three statements. The final three statements addressed the action-tendential responses toward suffering generated by the perceptual and affective components of an attitude. Thus, the scale was based on the triple-component model of an attitude.

In the punitive attitude, suffering is perceived as punishment for one's sins, but it is perceived as God's will in the resignation-to-the-will-of-God attitude. Suffering is perceived as a blessing in disguise in the divine-perceptive attitude. It is interpreted as one's bad luck in the bad-luck attitude and as a test God is making in the testing attitude. In the minimizing attitude

people exclaim "It could have been much worse" while in the personal-growth attitude people assert "I'll grow through my sufferings." The proverb "Out of mind, out of heart" underlies the defensive attitude, while in the redemptive attitude people say "I'll offer up my suffering." In the submission-to-the-laws-of-nature attitude people assume a passive stance of allowing nature to run its course, while in acceptance-of-the-human-condition attitude suffering is actively accepted.

Procedure. After reading the single page of instructions the respondents then read the 12 pages of items contained on laminated 8 ½ x 11 sheets of paper. Each respondent was instructed to mark on the answer sheet her/his endorsement or nonendorsement for each of the 99 items. To give a response to all the items most respondents took about 30 minutes. Very few requested an explanation of an item. No one volunteered an interpretation, an affect, or an action-tendency which they felt had not been covered in the questionnaire.

Results

Each of the 99 items received either an endorsement or nonendorsement from the 80 respondents. The cognitive items were weighted 3, the affective items were weighted 2, the action-tendential items were weighted 1. Each respondent had a total score on each of the 11 attitudes. These 11 weighted totals of each respondent were the input data in running tests of significance. The strongest

attitude with the retirees was the redemptive attitude, and the weakest attitude was the punitive attitude (See Figure 1). Lay men were slightly richer in attitudes than lay women who, in turn, were

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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slightly richer in attitudes toward personal suffering than both religious men and religious women. Lay people seemed to have stronger attitudes than religious people. Men appeared to have stronger attitudes than women.

Attitudes

A single classification analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that there was a significant difference among these 11 attitudes, F (10, 869) = 84.96, $p < .001$ (see Table 1). On the Newman-Keuls

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Insert Table 1 about here

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test, the punitive was found to differ significantly from all the other attitudes. The redemptive and human-condition attitudes were found to differ significantly from all the other attitudes except the laws-of-nature attitude. Newman-Keuls comparisons showed the punitive, defensive, testing attitudes differed significantly from all other attitudes except the bad-luck attitude. The punitive, defensive, testing and bad-luck attitudes were significantly different from all the other attitudes except the will-of-God attitude.

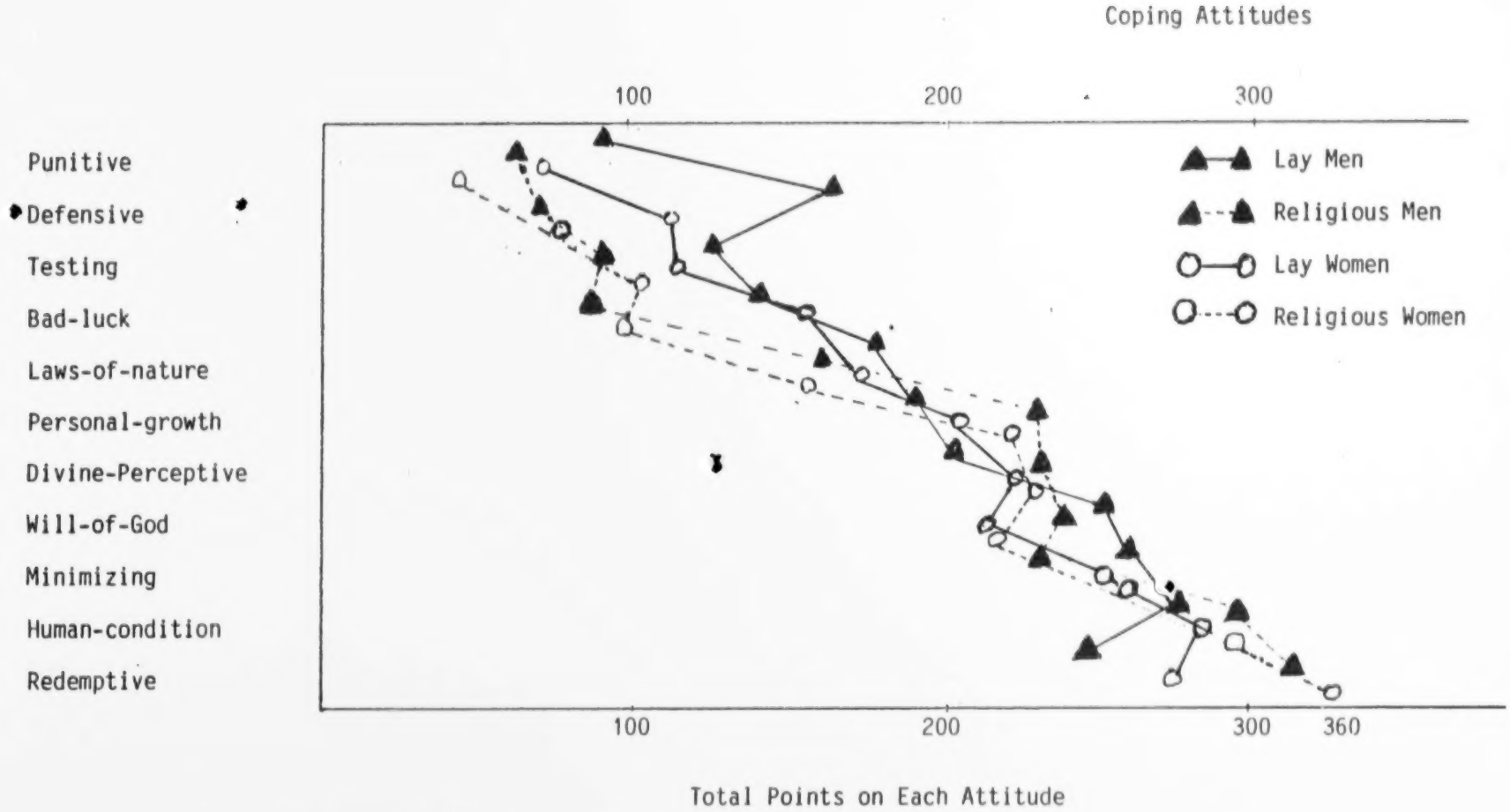


Figure 1. Weighted frequency totals of endorsements of 11 attitudes by 4 groups

Table 1

F values of 11 attitude endorsements by different groups

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F
Attitudes				
Between attitudes	12819.93	10	1281.99	84.96***
Within attitudes	13110.51	869	15.09	
Total	25930.44	879		
LM-LW-RM-RW Groups				
Between				
Attitudes	12819.94	10	1281.99	88.97***
Groups	44.79	3	14.93	1.03
Interaction	2715.71	30	90.52	2.35***
Within	12049.70	836	14.41	
Total	27630.14	879		
Lay-Religious				
Between				
Attitudes	12819.94	10	1281.99	89.21***
Groups	34.41	1	34.41	2.39
Interaction	748.32	10	74.83	5.21***
Within	12327.77	858	14.37	
Total	25930.44	879		
Man - Women				
Between				
Attitudes	12819.93	10	1281.99	84.96***
Groups	3.83	1	3.83	.25
Interaction	163.68	10	16.37	1.08
Within	12943.00	858	15.09	
Total	25930.44	879		

Note. LM-LW-RM-RW designate groups of lay men, lay women, religious men, religious women.
*** p .001

A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was run on each of the 11 attitudes, in which the first factor of sex has 2 levels, men and women, and the second factor of state has 2 levels, lay and religious (see Table 2). One significant main effect of sex on the laws-of-nature attitude was found, F (1, 76) = 4.45, $p < .05$. Four

Insert Table 2 about here

significant main effects of state were found: (a) on the defensive attitude, F (1, 76) = 11.91, $p < .0009$; (b) on the bad-luck attitude, F (1, 76) = 13.69, $p < .0004$; (c) on the personal-growth attitude, F (1,76) = 3.74, $p < .05$; (d) on the redemptive attitude, F (1,76) = 15.05, $p < .0002$. A near-significant main effect of state was found on the punitive attitude, F (1,76) = 3.17, $p < .07$. Only one near-significant interaction effect of sex and state was found on the minimizing attitude, F (1,76) = 3.29, $p < .07$.

Groups

A two-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the data in which the column factor, attitudes, has 11 levels, and the row factor, groups, has four levels (lay men, lay women, religious men, religious women). The main effect of the factor, attitudes, was found to be significant, F (10, 836) = 88.97, $p < .001$, which indicates that the four groups did discriminate among the attitudes. The main effect of the factor, groups, however, was not found to be significant, F (3,836) = 1.03, which means that the four groups did not differ

Table 2

F Ratios of sex and state on 11 attitudes

Attitudes	F ratio		
	Sex	State	Sex x State
Punitive	.87	3.17 *	.04
Defensive	.45	11.91 ***	2.33
Testing	.04	1.45	.83
Bad-luck	.30	13.69 ***	.06
Laws-of-nature	4.45 **	.10	.21
Personal-growth	.04	3.74 **	.69
Divine-Perceptive	.67	1.37	.99
Will-of-God	.01	.94	.00
Minimizing	1.00	1.15	3.29 *
Human-condition	.00	.83	.00
Redemptive	1.09	15.05 ***	.34

* p .07. ** p .05. *** p .001.

significantly among themselves in their endorsement of the attitudes. The computed F (30, 836) = 2.35 for interaction between attitudes and groups exceeds the .001 tabled value of F = 1.98, so the conclusion is drawn that the interaction effect is also significant at the .001 level. From the data it appears that both religious men and women have a stronger redemptive attitude than lay men and women.

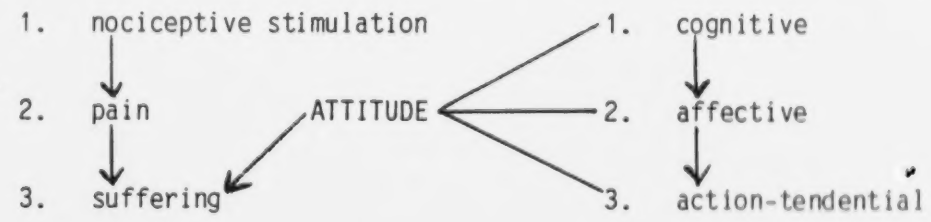
When the column factor, attitudes, has 11 levels, and the row factor, groups, has 2 levels, lay and religious, a two-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of factor, attitudes, F (10, 858) = 89.21, $p < .001$. When the row factor, groups, has 2 levels, men and women, there was a significant main effect of the factor, attitudes, F (10, 858) = 84.96, $p < .001$. Neither the main effect of the factor, sex, F (1, 858) = .25 reached significance, nor did the main effect of the factor, state, F (1, 858) = 2.39. There was found a significant interaction effect between attitudes and the groups of lay and religious respondents F (10, 858) = 5.21, $p < .001$. On the other hand, the interaction effect between attitudes and the groups of men and women did not reach significance, F (10, 858) = 1.08.

Results of Tukey's studentized range (HSD) test at the .05 level of significance showed that: (a) the lay group (M = 7.47) had a stronger bad-luck attitude than the religious group (M = 4.42); (b) the lay group (M = 7.02) had a stronger defensive attitude than the religious group (M = 3.80); (c) the religious group (M = 16.30) had a

stronger redemptive attitude than the lay group (M = 12.95); (d) men (M = 12.68) had a stronger laws-of-nature attitude than women (M = 10.63).

Discussion

By answering the items about suffering without being told of a specific pain, the respondents were implicitly making a distinction between the pain sensation and suffering. How clearly they saw the pain sensation as a response to nociceptive stimulation was not obvious from their filling out the questionnaire. Most, however, did seem to have the idea that injury and disorder in the body were sources of pain, and that such nociceptive stimulation of the body was not the only source of suffering. It was easily predicted that the affective items about the hurting reaction would be endorsed, but items of interpretation of suffering as well as items of action-tendencies were also readily endorsed as an integral part of a person's total response to suffering. Thus the respondents affirmed that a person reacts to suffering in the gestalt of an attitude. A paradigm of the chain of events, therefore, might be represented in this fashion:



Nociceptive stimulation starts the chain of events as a person steps on a tack. Pain nerve impulses from the foot are conveyed to the cerebral area to elicit a cognitive reaction "I stepped on a tack." Suffering or affective hurting is the reaction to the pain sensation so that a person exclaims "My foot hurts or pains me." Immediately meaning of this personal suffering is sought through making an interpretation of it "Just my luck." Feeling helpless and defenseless automatically follows because encountering such bad luck in no way could have been anticipated. Finally, this cognitive-affective response to personal suffering induces a person to expect a few accidents to occur in one's life.

Pre-investigation predictions had placed the punitive and bad-luck attitudes higher on the popularity scale, but the remaining attitudes ranked for the most part at their estimated positions. Since results show that the attitudes fell into groups of low, medium, and high strength, a factor-analytic study might find that there are fewer than 11 attitudes toward personal suffering. The fact of finding nonsignificant differences between all groups on the 11 attitudes clearly shows that the reason for acquiring the attitudes was not group membership. Acquisition of the attitudes is contingent upon other circumstances in a person's life, like individual confrontation with personal suffering, encounters with people actually suffering, specific parental teachings, having a creative or defensive personality, and exposures to an explanation

of suffering in human lives. These possible sources of attitudes suggest hypotheses for future investigation.

Conclusion

The endorsements of 99 items by 80 respondents show that people have a variety of attitudes toward personal suffering. Attitudes of low strength were punitive, defensive, testing, and bad-luck attitudes. Attitudes of medium strength were the submission-to-the-laws-of-nature, personal-growth, divine-perseptive, and resignation-to-the-will-of-God attitudes. Attitudes of high strength were the minimizing, acceptance-of-the-human-condition, and the redemptive attitudes toward personal suffering. A factor-analytic study may reveal fewer than 11 attitudes. An item analysis before using the instrument later in research will shorten the attitude scale.

Lay men were slightly richer in attitudes toward personal suffering than lay women who, in turn, were slightly richer than both religious men and religious women. Attitudes toward personal suffering were found to differ significantly among the respondents for the entire group of retirees and for all combinations of retiree groups.

Half of the respondents reported that they were thinking of physical sufferings in endorsing the items, one-fourth were thinking of mental sufferings, and the remaining fourth of mental and physical sufferings. Further investigation will find out

whether people tend to assume a specific attitude toward personal suffering when it results from a physical injury, a physiological disorder, a psychological loss, or a traumatic social event.

Since it was found that a patient possesses not a single interpretation of her/his suffering but has a large repertoire to draw upon, there is a need to explore the basis for selecting a particular interpretation and applying it to one's present suffering.

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